
Interior designers

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Significant Points

- Keen competition is expected for jobs in interior design because many talented individuals are attracted to careers as interior designers.
- Individuals with little or no formal training in interior design, as well as those lacking creativity and perseverance, will find it very difficult to establish and maintain a career in this occupation.
- About 3 out of 10 are self-employed.
- Postsecondary education—especially a bachelor's degree—is recommended for entry-level positions in interior design; licensure is required in 23 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Nature of the Work

Interior designers draw upon many disciplines to enhance the function, safety, and aesthetics of interior spaces. Interior designers are concerned with how different colors, textures, furniture, lighting, and space work together to meet the needs of a building's occupants. Designers are involved in planning the interior spaces of almost all buildings—offices, airport terminals, theaters, shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, schools, hospitals, and private residences. Designers help to improve these spaces in order to boost office productivity, increase sales, attract a more affluent clientele, provide a more relaxing hospital stay, or increase the building's market value.

Traditionally, most interior designers focused on decorating: choosing a style and color palette and then selecting appropriate furniture, floor and window coverings, artwork, and lighting. However, an increasing number of designers are becoming more involved in designing architectural detailing, such as crown molding and built-in bookshelves, or planning layouts of buildings undergoing renovation, including helping to determine the location of windows, stairways, escalators, and walkways. Interior designers must be able to read blueprints, understand building and fire codes, and know how to make the space accessible to the disabled. Designers frequently collaborate with architects, electricians, and building contractors to ensure that their designs are safe and meet construction requirements.

Despite the varied building spaces interior designers work with, almost all projects follow the same design process. The first step in developing a new design is to determine the needs of the client, known as programming. The designer usually will meet face-to-face with the client in order to find out how the space will be used and to get an idea of the client's design preferences and budget. For example, the designer might inquire about a family's cooking habits if the family is remodeling a kitchen or ask about a store or restaurant's target customer in order to pick an appropriate design. The designer also will visit the space and take inventory of the existing furniture and equipment as well as identify the any potential design problems and the positive attributes of the space.

Following the initial meeting with the client, the designer will formulate a design plan and estimate the costs on the basis of the client's goals and budget. Today, designs often are created with the use of computer-aided design (CAD), which provides a more

detailed layout and also allows for easier corrections than sketches made by hand. Once the designer has completed the proposed design, he or she will present it to the client and make revisions on the basis of the client's input.

When a design concept has been finalized, the designer will begin specifying the materials, finishes, and furnishings required, such as furniture, lighting, flooring, wall covering, and artwork. In addition, depending on the complexity of the project, the designer will need to prepare drawings and submit them for architectural review and approval by a construction inspector to ensure that the design meets all applicable building codes. If a project requires any structural work, the designer will need to work with an architect or engineer for that part of the project. Most designs also will require the hiring of contractors to do such technical work as lighting, plumbing, or electrical wiring. When necessary, the designer will choose qualified contractors and write up work contracts.

Finally, the designer will develop a timeline for the project and ensure that it is completed on time, including coordinating the work schedules of contractors if necessary. The designer will oversee the installation of the design elements, and after the project is complete, the designer, together with the client, will pay follow-up visits to the building site to ensure that the client is satisfied with the final product. If the client is not satisfied, the designer will make all necessary corrections.

Designers who work as in-store designers for furniture or home and garden stores offer their design services in addition to selling the store's merchandise. In-store designers provide services similar to those offered by other interior designers, such as selecting a style and color scheme that fits the client's needs or finding suitable accessories and lighting. However, in-store designers rarely visit their clients' spaces and are limited in using only a particular store's products.

Interior designers sometimes supervise assistants who carry out their creations and perform administrative tasks, such as reviewing catalogues and ordering samples. Designers who run their own businesses also may devote a considerable amount of time meeting with clients and contractors, developing new business contacts, examining equipment and space needs, and attending to business matters.

Although most interior designers do many kinds of projects, some specialize in one area of interior design. Some specialize in the type of building space—usually residential or commercial—while others specialize in a certain design element or type of client, such as health care facilities. The most common specialties of this kind are lighting, kitchen and bath, and closet designs. However, designers can specialize in almost any area of design, including acoustics and noise abatement, security, electronics and home theaters, home spas, and indoor gardens.

Three areas of design that are becoming increasingly popular are ergonomic design, elder design, and environmental—or green—design. Ergonomic design involves designing work spaces and furniture that emphasize good posture and minimize muscle strain on the body. Elder design involves planning interior space to aid in the movement of the elderly and disabled, such as widening passageways to accommodate wheelchairs. Green design involves selecting furniture and carpets that are free of chemicals and hypoallergenic and selecting construction materials that are energy efficient or are made from renewable resources.

Working Conditions

Working conditions and places of employment vary. Interior designers employed by large corporations or design firms generally work

regular hours in well-lighted and comfortable settings. Designers in smaller design consulting firms or those who freelance generally work on a contract, or job, basis. They frequently adjust their workday to suit their clients' schedules and deadlines, meeting with the clients during evening or weekend hours when necessary. Consultants and self-employed designers tend to work longer hours and in smaller, more congested environments.

Interior designers may work under stress to meet deadlines, stay on budget, and please clients. Self-employed designers also are under pressure to find new clients in order to maintain a steady income.

Designers may transact business in their own offices or studios or in clients' homes or offices. They also may travel to other locations, such as showrooms, design centers, clients' exhibit sites, and manufacturing facilities. With the increased speed and sophistication of computers and advanced communications networks, designers may form international design teams, serve a geographically more dispersed clientele, research design alternatives by using information on the Internet, and purchase supplies electronically, all with the aid of a computer in their workplace or studio.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Postsecondary education—especially a bachelor's degree—is recommended for entry-level positions in interior design. In addition, 24 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico register or license interior designers. Following formal training, graduates usually enter a 1-year to 3-year apprenticeship to gain experience before taking a national licensing exam or joining a professional association. Designers in States that do not require the exam may opt to take it as proof of their qualifications. The National Council administers the licensing exam for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ). To be eligible to take the exam, applicants must have at least 6 years of combined education and experience in interior design, of which at least 2 years constitute postsecondary education in design. Once candidates have passed the qualifying exam, they are granted the title of Certified, Registered, or Licensed Interior Designer, depending on the State. Continuing education is required in order to maintain one's licensure.

Training programs are available from professional design schools or from colleges and universities and usually take 2 to 4 years to complete. Graduates of 2-year and 3-year programs are awarded certificates or associate's degrees in interior design and normally qualify as assistants to interior designers upon graduation. Graduates with bachelor's degrees usually qualify for entry into a formal design apprenticeship program. Basic coursework includes computer-aided design (CAD), drawing, perspective, spatial planning, color and fabrics, furniture design, architecture, ergonomics, ethics, and psychology.

The National Association of Schools of Art and Design accredits approximately 250 postsecondary institutions with programs in art and design. Most of these schools award a degree in interior design. Applicants may be required to submit sketches and other examples of their artistic ability.

The Foundation for Interior Design Education Research also accredits interior design programs that lead to a bachelor's degree. In 2005, there were 137 accredited bachelor's degree programs in interior design in the United States, located primarily in schools of art, architecture, and home economics.

After the completion of formal training, interior designers will enter a 1-year to 3-year apprenticeship to gain experience before taking a licensing exam. Most apprentices work in design or architecture firms under the strict supervision of an experienced



Interior designers look at many fabric and paint samples in order to choose an appropriate design.

designer. Apprentices also may choose to gain experience working as an in-store designer in furniture stores. The NCIDQ offers the Interior Design Experience Program (IDEP), which helps entry-level interior designers gain valuable work experience by supervising work experience and offering mentoring services and workshops to new designers.

Following the apprenticeship, designers will take the national licensing exam or choose to become members of a professional association. Because registration or licensure is not mandatory in all States, membership in a professional association is an indication of an interior designer's qualifications and professional standing. The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) is the largest professional association for interior designers in the United States. Interior designers can qualify for membership with at least a 2-year or higher degree and work experience.

In addition to national licensure and membership in a professional association, optional certifications in kitchen and bath design are available from the National Kitchen and Bath Association. The association offers three different levels of certification for kitchen and bath designers, each completed through training seminars that culminate in certification exams.

Employers increasingly prefer interior designers who are familiar with CAD software. Interior designers also increasingly need to know the basics of architecture and engineering in order to ensure that their designs meet building safety codes.

In addition to possessing technical knowledge, interior designers must be creative, imaginative, and persistent and must be able to communicate their ideas in writing, visually, and verbally. Because tastes in style can change quickly, designers need to be well read, open to new ideas and influences, and quick to react to changing trends. Problem-solving skills and the ability to work independently and under pressure are important traits. People in this field need self-discipline to start projects on their own, to budget their time, and to meet deadlines and production schedules. Good business sense and sales ability also are important, especially for those who freelance or run their own business.

Beginning interior designers receive on-the-job training and normally need 1 to 3 years of training before they can advance to higher level positions. Experienced designers in large firms may advance to chief designer, design department head, or some other supervisory position. Some experienced designers open their own firms or decide to specialize in one aspect of interior design. Other designers leave the occupation to become teachers in schools of design or in colleges and universities. Many faculty members continue to consult privately or operate small design studios to complement their classroom activities.

Employment

Interior designers held about 65,000 jobs in 2004. Approximately 3 out of 10 were self-employed. About 2 out of 10 wage and salary interior designers worked in specialized design services. Another 1 out of 10 worked in architectural and landscape architectural services. The remaining of interior designers provided design services in furniture and home-furnishing stores, building material and supplies dealers, and residential building construction companies. Many interior designers also performed freelance work in addition to holding a salaried job in interior design or another occupation.

Job Outlook

Employment of interior designers is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2014. Economic expansion, growing homeowner wealth, and an increased interest in interior design will increase demand for designers. However, interior designers are expected to face keen competition for available positions because many talented individuals are attracted to this profession. Individuals with little or no formal training in interior design, as well as those lacking creativity and perseverance, will find it very difficult to establish and maintain a career in this occupation.

As the economy grows, more private businesses and consumers will request the services of interior designers. However, design services are considered a luxury expense and may be subject to fluctuations in the economy. For example, decreases in consumer and business income and spending caused by a slow economy can have a detrimental effect on employment of interior designers. Nevertheless, demand from the health care industry is expected to be especially high because of an anticipated increase in demand for facilities that will accommodate the aging population. Designers will be needed to make these facilities as comfortable and homelike as possible for patients. Demand from businesses in the hospitality industry—hotels, resorts, and restaurants—also is expected to be high because of an expected increase in tourism.

Recent increases in homeowner wealth and the growing popularity of home improvement television programs have increased demand for residential design services. Homeowners increasingly

have been using the equity in their homes to finance new additions, remodel aging kitchens and bathrooms, and update the general décor of the home. Many homeowners also have requested design help in adding year-round outdoor living spaces.

Growth in home improvement television programs and discount furniture stores has spurred a trend in do-it-yourself design, which could hamper employment growth of designers. However, some clients will still hire designers for a few initial consultations, but then will purchase and install the design elements themselves.

Some interior designers are choosing to specialize in one design element in order to create a niche for themselves in an increasingly competitive market. The demand for kitchen and bath design is growing in response to the increasing demand for home remodeling. Designs utilizing the latest technology, such as home theaters, state-of-the-art conference facilities, and security systems are expected to be especially popular. In addition, demand for home spas, indoor gardens, and outdoor living spaces are expected to continue to increase.

Extensive knowledge of ergonomics and green design are expected to be in demand. Ergonomic design has gained in popularity with the growth in the elderly population and workplace safety requirements. The public's growing awareness of environmental quality and the growing number of individuals with allergies and asthma are expected to increase the demand for green design.

Earnings

Median annual earnings for interior designers were \$40,670 in May 2004. The middle 50 percent earned between \$30,890 and \$53,790. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$23,440, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$71,220. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of interior designers in May 2004 were as follows:

Architectural, engineering, and related services	\$44,740
Specialized design services.....	42,000
Furniture stores	37,750

Interior design salaries vary widely with the specialty, type of employer, number of years of experience, and reputation of the individuals. Among salaried interior designers, those in large specialized design and architectural firms tend to earn higher and more stable salaries. Interior designers working in retail stores usually earn a commission, which can be irregular.

For residential design projects, self-employed interior designers and those working in smaller firms usually earn a per-hour consulting fee, plus a percentage of the total cost of furniture, lighting, artwork, and other design elements. For commercial projects, they might charge a per-hour consulting fee, charge by the square footage, or charge a flat fee for the whole project. Also, designers who use specialty contractors usually earn a percentage of the contractor's earnings on the project in return for hiring the contractor. Self-employed designers must provide their own benefits.

Related Occupations

Workers in other occupations who design or arrange objects to enhance their appearance and function include architects, except landscape and naval; artists and related workers; commercial and industrial designers; fashion designers; floral designers; graphic designers; and landscape architects.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on degrees, continuing education, and licensure programs in interior design and interior design research, contact:

➤ American Society of Interior Designers, 608 Massachusetts Ave. N.E., Washington, DC 20002-6006. Internet: [**http://www.asid.org**](http://www.asid.org)

For a list of schools with accredited bachelor's degree programs in interior design, contact:

➤ Foundation for Interior Design Education Research, 146 Monroe Center N.W., Suite 1318, Grand Rapids, MI 49503-2822. Internet: [**http://www.fider.org**](http://www.fider.org)

For general information about art and design and a list of accredited college-level programs, contact:

➤ National Association of Schools of Art and Design, 11250 Roger Bacon Dr., Suite 21, Reston, VA 20190-5248. Internet: [**http://nasad.arts-accredit.org**](http://nasad.arts-accredit.org)

For information on State licensing requirements and exams, and the Interior Design Experience Program, contact:

➤ National Council for Interior Design Qualification, 1200 18th St. NW., Suite 1001, Washington, DC 20036-2506. Internet: [**http://www.ncidq.org**](http://www.ncidq.org)

For information on careers, continuing education, and certification programs in the interior design specialty of residential kitchen and bath design, contact:

➤ National Kitchen and Bath Association, 687 Willow Grove St., Hackettstown, NJ 07840. Internet: [**http://www.nkba.org/student**](http://www.nkba.org/student)